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ACCENT
A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE
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MARIUS BEWLEY:

Hart Crane's Last Poem

The manuscript of "The Broken Tower" is dated March 25, 1932. As Hart Crane's death occurred on April 27, it is almost certainly his last poem. Mr. Brom Weber wrote of it: "This poem is as personal as any poem could be; it is unquestionably one of Crane's most magnificent pieces."[1] His judgment, if more enthusiastically expressed, echoes the general opinion. Unfortunately, its "magnificence" is of the blinding variety, for no one seems to know very precisely what it means. It is one of the most difficult poems Crane ever wrote, and the response to it, if admiring, has also been one of bafflement. Yet it is one of the most logically organized and coherent among Crane's more difficult pieces, and the statement it makes is more central to Crane's life and his view of poetry than that of any other title in *The Collected Poems.* But its images come to life only when we realize that they are the sheerest verbal integument for a meaning that perfectly informs every word and metaphor in the ten quatrains. To understand that meaning stanza by stanza is to revive the piety that, at the end, a poet may have a deeper intuition of the meaning of his own creative genius and his life than he ever had before.

If "The Broken Tower" is a deeply personal poem, it is also an objective and deliberately thought out expression of Crane's literary faith in his last months, and it expresses what he had learned of his

[1] Brom Weber, *Hart Crane* (New York, The Bodley Press, 1948), p. 313.

own limitations by writing *The Bridge*. But it expresses most of all the anguish of that discovery, and it is from this centre of pain that the poetry germinates. There is a letter that Crane wrote to Allen Tate acknowledging the latter's review of *The Bridge* in which he says:

> So many true things have a way of coming out all the better without the strain to sum up the universe in one impressive little pellet. I admit that I don't answer the requirements. My vision of poetry is too personal to 'answer the call.' And if I ever write any more verse it will probably be at least as personal as the idiom of *White Buildings* whether anyone cares to look at it or not.[2]

Crane's early recognition (which is recurrent in *The Letters*) that *The Bridge* failed is behind this statement to Tate, for no such modesty appears in the notorious letter to Otto Kahn of September 12, 1927, outlining the design of his Epic. After its publication, Crane's physical and psychological decline allowed him little opportunity for serious composition. We have only "The Broken Tower" that merits serious attention, and if it is "magnificent," it is also anomalous.

The best external clue to the meaning of the poem is Leslie Simpson's letter to the *New English Weekly,* which Philip Horton quotes in his biography of Crane:

> I was with Hart Crane in Taxco, Mexico the morning of January 27, this year, when he first conceived the idea of 'The Broken Tower.' The night before, being troubled with insomnia, he had risen before daybreak and walked down to the village square. It so happened that one of the innumerable Indian fiestas was to be celebrated that day, and Hart met the old Indian bell-ringer who was on his way down to the Church. He and Hart were old friends, and he brought Hart up into the tower with him to help him ring the bells. As Hart was swinging the clapper of the great bell, half drunk with its mighty music, the swift tropical dawn broke over the mountains. The sublimity of the scene and the thunder of the bells woke in Hart one of those gusts of joy of which only he was capable. He came striding up the hill afterwards in a sort of frenzy, refused his breakfast, and paced up and down the porch impatiently waiting for me to finish my coffee. Then he seized my arm and bore me off to the plaza where we sat in the shadow of the Church, Hart the while pouring out a magnificent cascade of words. It was a Hart Crane I had never known and an experience I shall never forget.[3]

---

[2] Edited by Brom Weber, *The Letters of Hart Crane* (New York, 1952), p. 353.
[3] Philip Horton, *Hart Crane* (New York, Compass Books, 1957) p. 292.

If the experience which began the chain of subjective associations was an intensely personal one, the final meaning which the reader should take from "The Broken Tower" is far more public than the imagery in which it is expressed, and which seems at first to be inscrutably private.

While "The Broken Tower" is self-contained as a poem, one's understanding of it will be aided if it is read with *The Bridge,* and particularly with "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," freshly in mind. In some ways it is a return on Crane's part, after the grandiose aspiration of *The Bridge,* to the more modest intention of the earlier sequence of three poems that compose "Faustus." In "Faustus" Crane asserts that in the interaction between the abstract ideal and the degrading encroachments of the world, the life of the imagination has much to endure but is not destroyed. Part III ends:

> Distinctly praise the years, whose volatile
> Blamed bleeding hands extend and thresh the height
> The imagination spans beyond despair,
> Outpacing bargain, vocable, and prayer.[4]

If the imagination persists beyond despair, its final victory is not complete. "Faustus" has shown us the ideal of beauty, symbolized by the Helen of Part I, swaying to jazz tunes and exposed to modern lust in the skyscraper roof garden of Part II. Finally, in Part III, the imaginative life and the ideal world towards which it aspires, seem utterly destroyed by the catastrophe of the first World War, which Crane unsuccessfully attempts to merge with images of the Trojan siege. But always Anchises escapes to the sea and founds a new city. The imaginative ideal cannot be achieved in a permanent form, but the transient intimations it gives us are all we have of life:

> A goose, tobacco and cologne—
> Three-winged and gold-shod prophecies of heaven,
> The lavish heart shall always have to leaven
> And spread with bells and voices, and atone
> The abating shadows of our conscript dust.

These lines are damaged poetically by the awkward obscurity of the opening triad of images, but they express an attitude basically more mature than the self-induced levitation that is attempted in the "Atlantis" section of *The Bridge.* The creative imagination struggles against odds in the world, but it carries an implicit promise with it

[4] *The Collected Poems of Hart Crane* (New York, 1946), p. 99.

that makes life endurable. A goose has much of the duck in its ancestry, but it also shows a good deal of the swan. The reference to tobacco as a prophecy of heaven is unfortunate because it merely suggests the daydreaming escape of the tobacco trance, while the introduction of cologne is too private and unsuccessful a reference to merit discussion. As human beings we are conscripted to the dust; our spiritual and emotional stature lessens in secular shadow, but the word of the poet, ringing out like a bell, prevents the ultimate encroachment of despair.

It was to this attitude that Crane returned in "The Broken Tower," but he was able to express it in his last poem with far greater concision; and the ordeal of having composed *The Bridge,* in which he tried to transcend his "conscript dust" towards some vaguely conceived cosmic consciousness, gives this poem the weight of a felt and suffered experience. It is coherent and emotionally realized in a degree that "Faustus and Helen" is not, but a similarity of imagery indicates the relation between the two pieces.

The first four stanzas of "The Broken Tower" comprise a movement that may be considered as a unit:

> The bell-rope that gathers God at dawn
> Dispatches me as though I dropped down the knell
> Of a spent day—to wander the cathedral lawn
> From pit to crucifix, feet chill on steps from hell.
>
> Have you not heard, have you not seen that corps
> Of shadows in the tower, whose shoulders sway
> Antiphonal carillons launched before
> The stars are caught and hived in the sun's ray?
>
> The bells, I say, the bells break down their tower;
> And swing I know not where. Their tongues engrave
> Membrane through marrow, my long-scattered score
> Of broken intervals. . . . And I, their sexton slave!
>
> Oval encyclicals in canyons heaping
> The impasse high with choir. Banked voices slain!
> Pagodas, campaniles with reveilles outleaping—
> O terraced echoes prostrate on the plain! . . .[5]

Bells had already been established in his mind as the poet's voice, carrying, as we gather from the "Faustus" passage cited, and Simpson's

[5] *Ibid.,* p. 135.

account of the genesis of the poem, an insistent religious connotation. Such a connotation would be agreeable to Crane as the disciple of Whitman, for whom the poet was prophet and priest. If this is the meaning of the bells, then the tower that supports them is necessarily the poet's vision. It adds little to the grace of one's reading at this point to suggest that the bell-rope of the first line is the creative impulse of the poet: but that is what it is. Just as the rope of a great bell tyrannically exacts the coordinated response of its ringer's whole body, so are the exactions of the creative impulse on the poet equally tyrannical. And as a church bell calls worshippers to prayer, and rings out divine praises, so the poet endeavors to celebrate his vision in song. But for the poet of imperfectly realized vision, poetic creation is as much of a struggle as bell-ringing is for the sexton who does not understand the rhythm and life of his bell. So, momentarily relinquishing his grasp, the poet wanders disconsolately between the hell of creative sterility and the heaven of imaginative fulfillment in his art.

In the second stanza, the shadows in the tower of vision are the poet's imperfect efforts to create. They recall "The abating shadows of our conscript dust" in "Faustus and Helen," and they suggest the shades of the dead. The sun is, in fact, Apollo, the god of poetry and music, who enters appropriately here after the dawn image of the poem's opening line. Although the god is not named in the poem, the reference to ". . . that tribunal monarch of the air/whose thigh embronzes earth," leaves us in no doubt. Moreover, the complex metaphorical development that so closely attends the unfolding argument makes the identification inevitable. The shadow-songs in the poet's tower have been created in darkness, not under the patronage of Apollo, and they are imperfect. In Part II of "Faustus and Helen" Crane spoke of "the siren of the springs of guilty song," and these songs, swaying their shoulders as if in dance, invoke the siren, not the god. They are the songs of lust and darkness that (to quote "Faustus" once more) lead only to

> metallic paradises
> Where cuckoos clucked to finches
> Above the deft catastrophe of drums.

In one of Crane's most impressive metaphors they are contrasted with the light and sweetness that poetry is capable of achieving. In *The Bridge,* stars were employed as a symbol of vision on the point of realization. To take a single instance, one might cite the seventh

stanza of "The Dance." The protagonist, before leaving his canoe near the headwaters of the river up which he has made his excursion backward in time to achieve mystic identification with the Indian heritage of the past, sees the morning star fading into light. It is not necessary to believe that Crane realized his vision in "The Dance" to recognize the symbolic role the morning star is called upon to play. It is the herald of that mystical immersion in his vision that follows almost immediately in the ritual dance and death. In "The Broken Tower" the stars that fade into the light of morning represent perfect songs that are totally assimilated in the vision they express. Their light is absorbed by the sun, the god of perfect poetry, and in one of his finest lines Crane heightens the star imagery with a suggestion of bees returning laden with sweetness to a great Platonic hive of absolute song. Perhaps it is worth remarking that Crane speaks of them in the second stanza in terms of a hypothetical future, and, in any case, as beyond his reach. His tower is still inhabited with shadows.

In the third stanza Crane gives us the poet's struggle with meaning. The torturing urgency to express what may even be inexpressible sometimes comes near to destroying the vision altogether:

> The bells, I say, the bells break down their tower.

This had happened, or had come dangerously near to happening, in Crane's own case when he wrote *The Bridge*. But even among the fragments of a vision no longer intact the creative urgency of the poet continues. The bells swing, surrealistically, even without a supporting faith. This constitutes agony for the poet, and recalls his earlier lines from Part I of "Faustus":

> *There is the world dimensional for*
> *those untwisted by the love of things*
> *irreconcilable . . .*

The commonplace dimensional world of things is only for those who accept its conventional surfaces and boundaries; it cannot be for the poet, even when his vision is broken. His poetry may be imperfect, but he must continue to make it.

But imperfect or not, there is a sanctity about poems. They are the poet's encyclicals, his sacred announcements. They are described as oval because, since the metaphor is that of bells, sound radiates outward from its source in circles; and because, since they attempt

to embody the poet's vision of the ideal and perfect, they suggest the circle of perfection, yet are imperfectly circular in themselves, a consequence of the poet's failure of vision. Life is an enclosed and depressed place from which the poet cannot free himself, and by the limits of which his vision is cut off. In the first stanza the poet had been "dropped down the knell of a spent day," just as in the "Proem" to *The Bridge* elevators had dropped him from the skyscraper tower of his vision into the city streets where cinemas invite humankind to the pursuit of appearance rather than of reality. The poet who seeks an absolute, as Crane had done in *The Bridge,* becomes more than ever aware of the shadow-filled impasse of this "world dimensional." The struggle to escape from its denials towards vision is across a battlefield scattered with the evidences of creative defeat—"Banked voices slain!" But it is a holy struggle and the voices (the poet's poems) are a choir's.

The "Atlantis" section of *The Bridge* celebrated high buildings and towers which became a symbol of aspiration and achieved vision. Returning to this imagery in pagodas and campaniles, eastern temples and bell towers for churches, Crane continues to insist on the religious nature of poetry in a surrealistic scene that faintly recalls the "Falling towers" passage in "What the Thunder Said." As the reveille (continuing the battlefield imagery of the preceding lines) is a summons to rise, the word emphasizes here, in a line of frenzied excitement bordering on delirium, the desperate quality of the poet's aspiration. It was a desperation Crane had learned from personal experience as he had watched his vision elude him and its promise turn to ashes.

But if the vision was fragmentary, it was all he had of life; it was both his love and his hell:

> And so it was I entered the broken world
> To trace the visionary company of love, its voice
> An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)
> But not for long to hold each desperate choice.
>
> My word I poured. But was it cognate, scored
> Of that tribunal monarch of the air
> Whose thigh embronzes earth, strikes crystal Word
> In wounds pledged once to hope—cleft to despair?

There is a reference here to the lovers Paola and Francesca, hurled aimlessly in infernal winds, clasped in each other's arms. The cruelty of the line

But not for long to hold each desperate choice,

exists in Crane's growing belief that he had betrayed his vision and his powers. What seemed to him his creative inconstancy is expressed here in imagery that wells up from the growing frustration, in his last years, of his increasingly aimless sexual encounters. He envied the lovers the eternity of their embrace, even in hell.

The sixth stanza gives us what are possibly the most moving lines of the poem. Crane handles the dual Christian and pagan implications of his stanza with a good deal of skill. "My word I poured." "Word" here has a theological significance that is immediately developed. The "tribunal monarch," as I have already said, is Apollo. Were his poems, Crane asks, embodiments of that vitality or life-force of the sun, suggested here in the reference to Apollo's embronzing thigh? Then capitalizing Word, he shifts it to its Christian meaning, associating in a fine act of compression, the word of the poet with the creative fiat of God. As the wounds of Christ brought hope, must the ordeal of the poet be hopeless? Is it (returning to Apollo in the musical term) "cleft to despair?"

The last four stanzas are technically the most original, as they are also the most difficult and the most personal. They provide us with Crane's final comment and judgment on his own practice as a poet, and on the possibilities of vision:

> The steep encroachments of my blood left me
> No answer (could blood hold such a lofty tower
> As flings the question true?)—or is it she
> Whose sweet mortality stirs latent power?—
>
> And through whose pulse I hear, counting the strokes
> My veins recall and add, revived and sure
> The angelus of wars my chest evokes:
> What I hold healed, original now, and pure . . .
>
> And builds, within, a tower that is not stone
> (Not stone can jacket heaven)—but slip
> Of pebbles—visible wings of silence sown
> In azure circles, widening as they dip
>
> The matrix of the heart, lift down the eye
> That shrines the quiet lake and swells a tower . . .
> The commodious, tall decorum of that sky
> Unseals her earth, and lifts love in its shower.

To recapitulate briefly: the poet, dedicated to an absolute, a Platonic vision, must necessarily fail to achieve it in his art. Crane had learned that the tower of absolute vision was much too high for him to climb in his poetry, and he realized this with peculiar clairvoyance at the close of his life when he seemed to be running down in a frenzy of neurotic debauchery. The steep encroachments of his blood seemed to be not only qualifying but destroying his poetic vision. Crane turns, therefore, from Apollo, whose fierce exactions he cannot satisfy, to the instruction of a lowlier, more human guide, "she/Whose sweet mortality stirs latent power." This woman is not merely an abstract personification like the Pocahontas of *The Bridge,* she is a gracious evocation from the very centre of Crane's own being, and she beckons him back to an acceptance of those creative limitations no poet can escape, but which *The Bridge* had desperately tried to deny. Crane is intimately aware of her in ways that suggest she is not, indeed, physically separable from Crane himself, but is an emblematic concentration of the feminine qualities of submission, humility, and passivity in his own nature. Crane counts the beats of her pulse, but it is important to observe that the throbbing is in his own veins. She faintly recalls, in her identification with Crane, the nostalgic, nameless yearning he had expressed in "Southern Cross," and embodied in his picture of

> homeless Eve
> Unwedded, stumbling gardenless, to grieve
> Windswept guitars on lonely decks forever.

This highly exceptional Eve, unwedded and an outcast (Crane's own condition), he describes as "docile, alas, from many arms/ . . . wraith of my unloved seed!" She is less the object of desire than Crane's feminine counterpart and (in the guitar image) the burden of his songs. In what Mr. Brom Weber has called Crane's "womanless life," this focusing of the female elements in his nature—acceptance, passivity, acquiescence—in terms of a symbolic woman is an astonishingly original way of encompassing the full circle of human experience which is necessary to achieve the final vision towards which the poem is directed, and which is explicitly described in the tenth stanza. Crane's technical achievement here is as startling and as original as Eliot's use of the male-female consciousness of Tiresias to achieve a somewhat similar goal in *The Waste Land.*

The woman of "The Broken Tower" is differentiated at once

from the swaying shadows of the second stanza. Her "sweet mortality" relates to the bee and honey imagery of perfect song, but simultaneously qualifies the reference by the idea of limit implicit in "mortality." The presence of the qualities she represents provides a regenerating influence on Crane's vision: "What I hold, healed, original now, and pure . . ." The agony he has endured so long subsides before the angelus, which teaches submission to the creative Word: "Be it done unto me. . . ." The sweet lady of his poem suddenly looks towards him in the guise of the Virgin.

From this new feeling of wholeness and integrity the poet builds a new vision in which there is an interaction between heaven and earth—a vision in which both the Apollo of absolute song and the lady of "sweet mortality" play their parts. The angelus, prayer of prophecy and submission, gives the key of the last two stanzas, and they are composed of humilities and quiet acceptances. A slip is a pier to which ships come for docking and unloading. The word suggests here Crane's willingness to accept what his vision brings to his poetry without the frenetic attempt to force his experience, as he had done for so long. It is worth noting that the circling wings of the ninth stanza recall the circling gull of the "Proem" which was a metaphorically successful prophecy of vision in *The Bridge* before that vision collapsed. In a sense Crane has reached in almost the last lines he ever wrote a new beginning and a better vision than the old.

There are two aspects to poetry, then: its god-like aspiration, symbolized by the sun imagery, and its human limitations, embodied in the evoked lady of the seventh and eighth stanzas. Neither aspect can exist successfully without the other. The last stanza deals in opposites which, in the imagery, live harmoniously together. Thus, "lift down" represents a poised balance between the two directions and tendencies. The "eye" is both the eye of the poet and the eye of heaven, the sun. Now that Crane understands that absolute vision can be approached only through the limiting and distorting perspectives of mortal vision he draws nearer to the possibility of authentic achievement than he had ever been before, and one word does service both for the poet's eye and the sun. This eye, or symbol of vision, shrines a lake, but it also swells a tower. Both images are sexual and have reference to the god and the earth-bound lady, between whom union is now possible. The blending of these constitutes the resolution, and the heaven of the poet's imagination.

The last two lines show the interaction once again of the two tendencies, but it is the god imagery, the sky and the sun, which remains the stronger, though only complete in its acceptance of earth and limitation.

I said earlier that in a sense Crane made a new and better beginning in this poem than he ever had before. Certainly the poem is built on a deeper, more sensitive intuition into the nature of art and his own genius than Crane had achieved at any earlier date. The wisdom is greater, the poetry more concentrated and intense. But it would be folly to assert that if Crane had lived he would have continued to overcome in this fashion the sterility that beset his last years. The poem lives in the anguish of a recognition that in all likelihood had come too late, even had Crane not died in 1932. It is well to remember that in Coleridge's great "Dejection" ode similar recognitions grew from similar anguish. Had Coleridge died in 1802 we might have lamented, on the grounds of the Ode, his unwritten poems. But Coleridge lived for thirty-two more years only to justify the prophecy he had made in "Dejection."

JULIA MARIA MORRISON:

A Weathervane

I

A weathervane should never make us wish,
Never make us tarry in the sand,
Pouting at the wind and shifting our feet,
Waiting to see it move. This might be costly:
Drinking down a day we can't afford
And sweeping the night before we rest.
Is this an image, home—where we can stop
Forever if we choose? or is it chance,
Wild with turning on the faces of the sky?
Half-Chick was always anxious for a change
But fitted well the air of his step-home;
Who was patron there, the spire or he?
No matter though, he stayed, put on a cap—
For tilting lightning with—and did his share.

His world is not of cottages and pine;
Its hills are not for nesting. Stone is king
And wears away the point of weather's boots.
I have not stopped here thinking the wells are full,
To see the grasses yellowing toward hay
Or to ask a farmer when the sun goes down—
For such I wouldn't linger in this wind,
I'd stretch and talk, below the weathervane,
Leaving just my footprints to this frenzied air.

II

Today I wished upon the weathervane.
It faced east as my window did
The year I liked to watch Orion rise—
Classic tourist of provincial skies—
Tonight he's rising, too, on alien hills
And in a wind that turns our eyes to stone.

My head has turned so often in this air
Yet I'm still conscious of the times of stars,
Where I saw them best and why I looked.
Like Half-Chick they are serviceable here,
Not being strangers to the wind and stone.
I am the tourist now, who can't recall
How many turns one makes in going home,
Who seeks directions from the weathervane.

A person gazing at a point in time
Too many nights on end begins to drift,
To find some darkness turning round the clock.
Then worlds of pine and cottage seem across the hill
Or, at worst, below the sand one tarries in.
Such is the hope in Half-Chick's industry:
He points where home would be while lingering here
Long enough to lose the name of guest,
Then showing even lightning to its bed.

III

One night was April. With Orion gone
And Half-Chick looking west, I was alone
And more provincial than a guest should be.
Wind and stones retained the constancy
One likes when, having stopped without fixed plans
For leaving, he lingers on and maybe draws
With his feet in the sand pictures of home.
It is such pictures that I sometimes see
Moving westward through this stony air.
And sometimes at midnight when the wind's alone,
I hear Half-Chick turning against the dark,
Giving it form. He loves his cage—the world—
More than a mythic wing. His constancy is chance.
Here is balance between wish and home.

The World Is Bigness

The world is bigness, when the sun is high.
Speaking of charts, no pencil duplicates
The curve of waters in their search for ground:
Lines of sight are what we measure by.

Speaking of charts, no pencil duplicates
The circle summer runs around a tree;
Though we're inclined to finger bark and leaves,
The moving eye is that which illustrates.

The curve of waters in their search for ground
Evades us when we set out our thirst
To catch the rain. We're so aware of blood
That steady dripping is a mortal sound.

Lines of sight are what we measure by
In spite of noise and odors in the street.
We cope with darkness from a man-size bed;
The world is bigness.

When the sun is high
Lines of sight are what we measure by.

Unwitting Sorceress

She dotes on whiteness as the candle melts
Without a flame around: the sun of March
Can be as quick as that, too late for snow.

Her fingers on the curtains' glare extend
The lines of higher ground the frost has quit.
She leaves the shape of wax. And spring begins.

Sometime Fortune Teller

My mind is heavy as Pandora's box
When all the awful buzzing weighed it down
Onto the colder basses of the air.
My eyes won't leave conjunctions in the sky
And arcs of Saturn float into the noon.
The dust of comets makes my forehead burn.

I know the streets I walk, observe the trees,
And even set a saucer for old cats;
But, as a child, the silence cleft my brain
Too long, and now my voice is just a wish,
A thought of icebergs in an August sun.

But I prepare: some rouge and powder give
My face an age, my mind the very clothing
Of a trance. Forget my morning thoughts,
Put out the cat—I'm paid for singing,
And my voice produces tremors in the sun;
Old icebergs fade but never melt for good.

Committed

I built my house, obsessed by heavy walls,
No cottage with its windows and short halls;
I wanted more a fort: who cares for view?
No garden ever filled my need for blue.

Discovery

In water she began her phantasy:
Her eyes were victim to the kind of green
That oceans and wet earth might call the sky;
She found her thumbs embedded in a lie.

Gethsemane

It wasn't that He knew but that we'd looked.
The moon behind His head had made too much
Of eyes and trees and sinister demands
In parks. And now too late to try the sun,
We kept the gate from squeaking—quite enough,
This earned our keep. And more, the night brought on
The talk which makes a worker think of home.
But any wound seems larger in the dark
And we condemned the fickleness of light,
Leaving the gate to grapple with the wind.

Whose problems were these, that we shouldn't rest?

SARAH YOUNGBLOOD:

Atlantic Crossing

(for Anne Davidson)

Our bow bears west but wakes
No coral bones, stirs no deep
Dreams of the broken sailors where
They toss and turn. Eastward
In our wake, moons dance and drown.
You say
The seastruck, sundered moon cries
Down, cries down our ship. But wise
The man who knows by what disguise
He moves. How should those sailors rise
But single for the sea they chose,
Booted and buckled with an oath, their eyes

No more a mirror than the moon, whose
Bright division is the sea's device?

I say our careful ship takes
Bearing from the dead whose sleep
The sea insures, whose difficult care
Protects their deaths. Westward
Of our bow, the single moon looks down.

The Sleeping Poet

So it begins always:
the blue feet of birds speak to him,
tongues of the sea-anemone sing
of the sea's kiss. He moves through shapes
of fire, past the charmed beasts, seeking
the river: *Come where the water leaps
and rides: when the sea has gathered you,
you are the god.* The sensual tongues,
spiralling birds, spell his way.

Each time those beasts—mute images,
enthralled—become his terror. Fire
does not burn as their eyes burn, metallic,
pitiful. . . . But dreams turn all to fire,
turn fire to water, and bring him where
the river waits, naked to plunge and drift.
Only when his lips lean to the water
praising the rituals of gods
does he awake to what the beasts have heard.
The river is irrelevant and swift.

BRUCE BROOKS:

Journey Through the Skin

I

The general, disguised as a merchant, was sprawled face down in the snow near the wrecked train. Karl Sholz had shot him. One of the anarchists had raised the black flag of Batko Makhno's guerrilla army over the railway station. The general's widow, a woman in her forties, wept, wailed that he was an angry child, as Karl ripped open her quilted coat, revealing the velvet gown. "Little mother, I have gonorrhea and syphilis too." With that he tore the wine-colored fabric from her pallid flesh and flung her to a manure heap where he raped her, crushing the matronly body under his until it was still. Before leaving, he pocketed the jewels hidden beneath her thighs. "You're a desperate one," Batko Makhno said, blowing up a looted silver samovar. His young lieutenant smiled and tossed a ruby to a peasant boy reclining on top of the stove. He hid it in his shirt.

Outside the library a cotton mill whistle blew. It was four-thirty and Karl Sholz knew he should have ridden with Batko Makhno's anarchist army through the revolution-torn Ukraine. He was eighteen and kept his red hair cropped short. Spitting on the polished floor, he slipped toward the staircase. It curved down like a corkscrew, ending in the children's room. As he sat on the iron steps he watched a boy crouch along the low shelves. "Why did I come here?" In a corner out of the librarian's sight, the boy knelt. The fluorescent lights were dark, the tubes ran cold along the ceiling. Karl saw him hide a book in his shirt.

Karl retreated half-way up the spiral. When the boy climbed the staircase, shoulders hunched together, he eyed Karl with alarm and tried to edge by. Smiling on the right side of his mouth where the scar curved over his cheek, Karl gripped the boy's arm and pulled the book from his shirt. It was something rebound in orange cloth. Karl read *The Surprising Adventures of Medford Meadow Mole* on the title page. "Who in hell are you?" The boy jerked free and smoothed his shirt. "Can't a person check out a book?"

"He can even steal one," Karl said, looking at the illustrations. Now the boy was glaring at him, his eyes resembling bullet holes

in a paper target, awkwardly holding a penknife. Karl laughed and slammed the book on the hand; the knife clattered on the steps. With a corner of the book Karl absently traced the outline of his scar.

"Did you cut yourself shaving?"

"You're a desperate character." Karl struck him across the face and then balanced the book on his fingertips. The boy was crying harshly. Karl started to offer the book but changed his mind and withdrew it. "If you like I'll sneak it out for you." Tears streaking his face, the boy refused to look at him. "Here, take my handkerchief but pick up your knife." Tucking the book in his shirt, Karl put a hand on the boy's back to guide him up the spiral. As they came down steps into the afternoon Karl said, "Tell me your name," and returned the book. The boy had stopped crying.

"Edgar is such a stupid name so I call myself E. Tusher. Mrs. Adkins is my mother. I live here in town but I know who you are."

"Who am I?" Karl asked. They were crossing the courthouse lawn. Under oak trees patches of red clay made the grass ragged. Fragrant purple blooms clung to brick walls. It had just turned May; there was little traffic on the streets. "It's so warm and lazy, I feel thirsty." He pulled E. Tusher into a restaurant beside the bus terminal and ordered gingerale. Fan blades revolved in slow circles below the high ceiling.

"Your father is General Sholz, commandant at the Fort." E. Tusher sipped gingerale and leaned back in his chair.

"That's what General Dad Sir does for a living, for fun he grows flowers. Mummy Darling—that's my mother—is a professional invalid. We both hate flowers."

E. Tusher giggled behind his hand. "My mother is always playing in amateur golf tournaments." His features were delicate beneath the soft brown hair lying against his skull in natural undulations. "I'm fourteen, in case you wondered."

"I always carry a knife." Karl dropped a switch blade on the table.

"Why did they expel you from that military school? I've often wondered about it. Is it true you got your scar in a knife fight there?"

Karl made a face. "What else did you hear?" He replaced the knife in his pocket. "Anyhow, it's my secret."

E. Tusher swallowed and held up his hand. "Everything at the library just now I had all planned in advance so I could meet

you." Karl shrugged. E. Tusher turned red. "Well I did, God damn you!" E. Tusher craned over the table. "I studied your habits. At school I followed you and you didn't even know." Karl shook his head. E. Tusher dropped his eyes. "That's all a lie. I just didn't want you to feel superior." He hesitated. "But I did have a plan in mind for later on." Lidding his eyes, E. Tusher added, "Not now but some day maybe I'll tell you about it."

"Watch this, E. Tusher." Karl lighted a cigarette and puffed steadily on it. When the coal was long and glowing he crushed it out on the back of his hand, feigning indifference to the pain. Although he was careful not to look at E. Tusher, he felt gratified at a sharp intake of breath on the other side of the table. Then he stood up. "I've got to catch a bus. I guess I'll see you at school tomorrow." He left a dime on the table.

Karl always entered the commandant's quarters through the kitchen. It was a white frame building with a square-pillared gallery across the front and high-ceilinged rooms inside. Flowering shrubs screened the house from the road. Hundreds of squirrels lived in the trees that made the grounds, a two-acre area, resemble a tame forest. Around the house flowers were more profuse. Karl knew the names of none. Before going into the kitchen, he tore a livid bloom from a green branch and carefully ground it beneath his heel. Broken on the gravel path, it had a garbage look. A cannon went off. Entering the house, he was conscious of bugle notes as the flag was lowered.

Essie May Smith leaned over the kitchen table, reading the Atlanta *Journal,* ashes from her cigarette dropping on the comic page. Karl reached his arms around her. "I'm home from school, Mummy Darling."

She picked a tobacco flake from her tongue. "Stop that carrying on, child. I get mad. Got nothing better to do but laugh at me all the time." Essie May Smith flung the paper at him.

"I'm laughing?" Karl let the paper fall to the floor. "Aren't you going to fix my supper?"

"You go see your mother first. She upstairs waiting." Essie May Smith ran water in the sink.

"No, I want to wait until she's asleep."

"You the cruelest boy. Eat in the kitchen, I suppose?" She clapped a hand over her mouth, laughter distorting her face.

On his way up the wide staircase, Karl stamped his feet on the treads. Steel cleats made his steps echo down the hallway to his mother's door. There he stopped, clicked his heels and drummed his fists on the panels. After entering he let the door slam and sniffed the air, stale and flat with medicinal odors. Large red no-smoking signs hung on all the walls. The windows on the gallery were nailed shut to keep out the distant street noises and the odors of the general's flowers which gagged the invalid. A row of oxygen tanks, many of them empty according to their gauges, lined one wall. On the right side of the double bed a long table was littered with medicine bottles, dirty spoons and stained dabs of absorbent cotton. Rolls of dust were scattered over the uncarpeted floor. There were no curtains on the tall windows, no distracting pictures on the walls, no clock in the room. On the left side of the bed stood an oxygen tank on wheels. A tube from it was attached to a black rubber mask discarded on one of the pillows. In the middle of the bed the invalid herself lay stiffly, both hands pressed to her forehead, their veins raised. "I'm sick. Must you torture me?"

"Oh Mummy Darling, do stop pretending you're dying and open your eyes. It's your little boy Karl come to see you at last, and heaven knows, I'm mainly responsible for your condition." He grinned. "I'll light a cigarette."

His mother drew the mask over her face to breathe audibly for several minutes. Removing it, she said, "Yes, you'll kill me." Her fingers fretted at the dingy lace around her throat. "You'll be sorry when I'm dead." The bedding had not been changed for a month. Unable to get up now, she could not bear being tossed on the mattress while the sheets were changed. Essie May Smith came into the room only at the ring of a special bell in the kitchen that called her to empty bedpans which the invalid administered herself and then set on the floor beside the oxygen tank. At her own request she had not been examined by a doctor since the birth of her son. "Why do you hate me?"

"I don't know, Mummy Darling, I just do." Karl laughed and snapped his fingers.

"What did you do today?" She spoke slowly, distinctly forming each word as if it were separate and unrelated to the ones that came before or after.

"I went to the high school in town the same as every day since I came back after being expelled."

"You did that, too, just to wound me." She smiled. "Everything

you do is to spite me. Your very existence is a personal affront. Your father is a fool not to see it."

"Oh, General Dad Sir is a fool all right." He turned so as not to look at her. "I like to think of you alone up here."

His mother raised herself on her elbows, grabbed the mask and, glaring at him, threw it away from her. It fell near the wall, its tube stretched across the floor. Moaning, she fell back among the pillows. "My condition means nothing to you. Does it?"

"I never think about it." He let his eyes stray over the signs. "Do you remember once when I was little and I picked a big bunch of flowers and brought them to you? We were stationed in Texas. Essie May Smith told me you were very sick. He was only Major Dad Sir then but I ruined a whole flower bed for you."

"No, I don't remember the incident."

"You were asleep in a room like this. I brought the flowers to your bed and stood over you holding them in my hands. You must have sensed me standing there because you opened your eyes. You stared at me and I started to explain and to give you the flowers. But you began to scream at me. Then you grabbed the flowers and threw them away from you. I remember I was frightened. Why did you do that?"

"No, I don't remember it at all." The invalid brushed her hands over the sheets. "No, I'm sure it's not at all true."

"Essie May Smith told me I had convulsions. She said it took all night to calm me. The next day General Dad Sir punished me. I can't remember how."

She made a grimace. "However, I do recall that when you were seven we had to transfer you to another school because you were caught stealing money from a teacher's desk."

Karl looked at her. "That was in Texas after the flowers. General Dad Sir punished me and the next week arranged an allowance. Essie May Smith gave me fifty cents every Saturday."

The invalid pursed her lips. "I'm sure she has always been a good mother to you." Karl flipped open his knife. She laughed harshly. "But honey, I was sick. A lady isn't an animal. Why, what a little baby you are."

"Shut up!" Her laughter did not stop. "If you don't be quiet I'll cut you." Karl leaned above his mother, pointing the knife at her throat.

"I didn't know you cared." She sniffed. "Nor do I care for your

trashy criminal habits." She rolled onto her side. "Where did I put my mask?" She waited.

Karl closed the knife and slipped it back in his pocket. "I can always frighten you."

She blinked archly. "And I can humiliate you." She slid a hand beneath the pillows. "Where is it?"

"On the floor by the wall."

"Thank you." She watched him. "Well, bring it to me."

"No, you walk over here and get it."

"But I can't get out of bed. I'm too weak now. I'd fall down." Her voice pleaded.

"I'd pick you up."

She crossed her arms and shook her head. "No, I don't trust you."

"You don't trust me." She watched him as he walked to the oxygen tank next to her bed. The wheels stuck at first but he rolled it to the door, the mask scraping on the floor.

His mother stared after him. "Bring it back, please bring it back to me. I need it badly now and I'll even forgive you." Her voice finished weakly.

"You'll forgive me?"

"Yes. For everything you have ever done to me, from the beginning."

Karl balanced the mask in his hand; dust marred its smooth surface. "What if I've never felt any need for it? What if I refuse to accept?"

She stretched her hands before her. "Oxygen. I need it. I'll die without it." She hid her face with a corner of the sheet. "I'll die." She spoke rapidly. "You wouldn't want me to die like this in front of you? You wouldn't want my death on your hands?"

"Yes."

"I can't believe that. You're saying it out of spite." She sucked breath through her mouth.

He watched her fingers tug at her throat. "Was it true about the flowers? Did it happen like that?"

Her mouth closed tightly. She shook her head and tossed her hands. "It didn't happen."

"Well, die then."

His supper had been placed on the table when he got back to the kitchen. While he ate, Essie May Smith rested against the sink, singing to herself, tapping her foot. "He cut my thirty-two, same as

he had a pocket knife. Yeah, cut my thirty-two, just like he had a pocket knife." Pushing aside the unfinished plate, Karl wiped his mouth and started outside. The flowers oppressed him. "Well listen everybody, I made a mistake in life." Essie May Smith stopped her song. A bell called her to the invalid's room.

Karl hurried across the yard to his quarters, formerly the maid's cabin. Mimosa trees surrounded it. The garage was close enough to touch if he wanted to stick his hand through a window. The floor sagged underfoot in spots, the windows were filmed with dirt. Reclining on the cot, he stared into the dark light bulb dangling from the ceiling. Besides the cot, the room was furnished with a white-painted bureau whose drawers would not close, a straight chair with broken rungs and a scarred table. Paper-bound books and empty beer cans were strewn over bureau and table. On the wall at the foot of the cot hung a framed photograph of Batko Makhno. Its cold eyes gazed at him.

Through the doorway Karl saw his father appear at the back of the house, watering can in hand, a pipe clenched between his teeth. On the gravel path the general bent down to pick up a blossom. He approached the cabin. Karl lay still, holding his breath. The general came to the door and without glancing inside threw the flower into the dark room. It brushed against Karl's face and fell on the floor. He placed it beneath his pillow. From the closet shelf he took a bottle of whiskey and stepped into the bathroom. When he turned on the light cockroaches scurried under the tub. He removed a can of beer from the water tank of the toilet, punched it open and drank off half to refill it with whiskey. Sitting on the doorsill, he drank the tepid mixture slowly and watched his father pottering around the bushes, culling dead blooms, smoke from his pipe hanging in the still air, penetrating to the cabin. The blister on his hand started to pain. He pressed his lips to it.

II

Medford Meadow Mole lived in a bird cage on the window sill. Throwing the book on his bed, E. Tusher squatted on the floor and pressed his face against the bars. One end was lined with glass and filled with dirt that the mole had tunneled. Medford was asleep, curled in a cul de sac against the glass. E. Tusher tapped the surface. Medford stirred, roused himself and disappeared around a bend. E. Tusher waited as he emerged from the earth and crawled to the

incline. Unlatching the wire door, he offered his hand for a platform. Claws rasping on the wood, Medford hitched up the incline and lay still on the hand that received him. Gently pressing the mole to his cheek, E. Tusher lay down on the bed. "I love you," he whispered and let the mole ramble over the bedspread.

"Medford," E. Tusher said in a low voice, "you remember that book on you I was always talking about? Well, I got it today. We'll always have it now." Medford stopped against his ear to explore its crevices with his star-pointed nose. E. Tusher twisted his head away. "Medford, you damned old son of a bitch, stop that." He set the mole on his chest. Taking up *The Surprising Adventures of Medford Meadow Mole,* E. Tusher turned to the beginning and read aloud. About halfway through the first adventure, Medford had a bowel movement on the bed. There was little mess but E. Tusher shook his head and frowned. Sternly putting aside the book, he picked the mole up by its tail and spanked it with his forefinger. Then he placed it in the cage, slamming the door.

"What will become of you, Medford? Is this a way to repay me after I've gone to so much trouble to give you a treat?" Medford wandered about his exercise yard, nosing among two empty doll cups. "I've got a good mind not to give you any supper." Removing the cups from the cage, E. Tusher filled one with water and sprinkled dried insects in the other, added a little liquid and stirred with a pencil. Medford had climbed the incline; his nose protruded between the bars. "Do be patient," E. Tusher said sharply. He poked the mole back to place the cups inside. Medford began to eat. "What would you do without me?" E. Tusher asked. He flicked the mole's excrement off the bedspread with his fingers. Taking up the book again, he curled on his side.

It was a windy Friday. There were tornadoes in Alabama. The sun was blotted out by rust-colored clouds of dust miles away. E. Tusher had watched for Karl in the corridors between classes but had seen him nowhere. When he came to the end of the line in the cafeteria he looked carefully about the basement room for almost a minute while he was bumped with trays and shouldered aside, before he finally saw Karl alone at a table nearly hidden by a row of steel pillars. At the table Karl indicated the chair beside his and E. Tusher joined him. The window above them was partially open, enveloping them now and then with sudden gusts of air. Excited by sensations, E. Tusher could barely nibble on a sandwich. Karl stroked him on

the cheek with his knuckles. "What's the trouble?" E. Tusher raised his fingers to his cheek. "Tell me your secret ambition, E. Tusher—besides becoming a knife artist, I mean."

"I just live from day to day." E. Tusher ducked his head. "But I have thought about becoming a jewel thief or an international spy. When I'm older I plan to grow a mustache."

"I think I'll be a professional revolutionist, an anarchist with a red beard."

"That will be beautiful," E. Tusher said. "Come home with me after school. This weekend there won't be anybody at the house."

"That won't be any trouble," Karl said. "Finish your lunch and we'll go outside."

Off to one side of the building there was a gully in a patch of woods. They leaned against a vine-hung tree. Karl offered a cigarette to E. Tusher. Smoking, Karl began to carve on the bark. E. Tusher puffed cautiously and coughed. He turned red when Karl looked at him. "It's my first cigarette," he said angrily, swallowing smoke, choking.

"You're a weird child." Karl pounded his back. "Throw it away now. There'll be time for more."

E. Tusher shivered in the wind and cleared his throat. "What are you carving?"

"The date. Maybe later on I'll add our initials." A bell rang to end the lunch hour. They followed others back into the building.

A city school bus rounded the corner. The wind had fallen. The Adkins house was concealed behind a tall hedge. Holding the front door open, E. Tusher gestured Karl inside. "They'll be at a tournament in Augusta until Sunday night and we can do anything we please." E. Tusher laughed, letting his books drop on the living-room floor. Karl stood in the hall with his hands jammed in his pockets. "I never come in here when they're home," E. Tusher said. After kicking his shoes into the cold fireplace, E. Tusher flung himself on a pink couch. Karl sat on the gray carpet, resting his head against the couch.

Photographs in metal frames were placed in a row along the mantel. "Who's the man on the end, the one with the little mustache?" Karl asked.

"That was my father," E. Tusher said, his face buried in a silk cushion. "He came from a rich family and wrote poems. But he hung himself just before I was born."

"Why do you suppose he did that?"

"Probably because he couldn't stand my mother, I don't know. In my room I have a book of his poetry but I've never read it." E. Tusher sighed and rolled over. "The thin lady next to him is Mary Jane. She's been living with my mother as long as I can remember. That big one in the middle is my mother and I don't know who the rest are."

"Well, they look just like other people," Karl said.

E. Tusher jumped to his feet, yawned and stretched. Stalking around the room on tiptoe he fingered objects on tables. In the hall he said, "Come to my room and meet Medford Meadow Mole."

Karl perched on the bed while the mole prowled over his thighs. E. Tusher sat cross-legged on the floor. "See, Medford likes you. Now I really must feed him." He plucked the mole from Karl's lap.

As E. Tusher was preparing the dried insects, Karl asked, "How do you know he's a male?"

E. Tusher slipped the cups inside the cage. "What else could Medford be?"

Karl shrugged. "I don't know zoology but I never thought moles were bisexual."

E. Tusher closed the cage. "Medford is masculine, you hear. That's all there is to it." He stamped a stockinged foot. Frowning, he tucked *The Surprising Adventures of Medford Meadow Mole* under his arm. "Once I stole a jewel," he said. "Look." From the desk he took out a metal box. He unlocked it and pulled a gold ring from the bottom. "My father's wedding ring. I took it from my mother's drawer." He slipped the ring over the blade of his penknife. "I'll wear it this weekend. See, it fits. My father had small hands."

"Let's go back to the other room," Karl said.

E. Tusher followed Karl through the door. As they passed a farther doorway he said, "I always feel nauseated whenever I go in there. With his foot he pointed into a room with twin beds close together.

Karl nodded. "There's liquor in the house?"

"There are all kinds of bottles in the dining-room. Do you drink quite a little?" E. Tusher asked.

"I guess so," Karl said. In the living-room he rested in an armchair.

"I've heard my father was an alcoholic." E. Tusher lay down on the rug and opened the book. "You won't become an alcoholic, will you?"

"I probably won't live to be thirty."

E. Tusher glanced up sharply. "Why not?"

"Maybe I'll be executed by a firing squad in South America. It's something to think about."

"My father was younger than that when he hung himself. Mary Jane drinks a lot. My mother is enough to drive anybody to drink. She watches me take baths and shakes her head." E. Tusher lost his page and shoved the book aside.

"Why does she do that?"

"Oh, you know." Now he was kneeling. "Karl, I hate my mother." There was hysteria in his laughter. "Don't you hate your parents?"

"My mother. I'm going to murder her this summer. One warm night I'll burn her alive in her bed." Karl drummed on the arms of the chair with his hands.

E. Tusher stared, eyes wide, his lips parted. "Really?"

"Why not?" Karl nodded.

"But what about your father?" E. Tusher started to cross the room toward Karl's chair. "Do you hate him?"

Karl sat without moving, gazing into the fireplace where shoes were scattered. "I don't know."

"Will you really kill your mother?"

"Yes, about three or four weeks from now when school is out."

"Oh," E. Tusher said. "Why do you want to wait?" He hesitated. "Somehow I don't think it can be done."

Karl's eyes held his. "If I wait it will be easier for us to go away together afterwards."

E. Tusher closed his eyes and crossed his hands on his chest. "Then you will, you will." E. Tusher was in front of the chair. His hands were trembling. "I feel so excited." His voice was soft but incoherent, even to himself. His fingers, as if of their own accord, touched Karl's scar. The gold ring gleamed against the skin. His mind seemed to be the eye of the storm that was whirling his body through space. There was a dark pressure on his brain and he fell to the floor half fainting.

III

Karl opened the back door and came into the dark kitchen. There was a light in the pantry. Although there was no odor of tobacco smoke, he knew the general was standing there. Karl leaned against the sink to wait, felt cold and rubbed his arms. The general entered

the kitchen and stood beside the refrigerator. Karl held his breath. A sandwich in one hand, the general looked at him. "Father." His voice was thick, he blushed.

"I was looking for a glass." His father set the sandwich on the table.

"I'll get it for you." Karl became numb; he had spoken too quickly. The first glass he reached for smashed on the floor. The second he held tightly until his father came up to him and took it from his hand.

"Thank you," the general said, filling the glass with tomato juice. Nodding once at Karl, he turned to go out through the pantry, leaving the light burning. Karl probed pieces of glass with his toe. The fragments flashed reflected light. School had ended three days ago. It would happen tomorrow night.

It was after two in the morning when Karl let the car pass between brick posts marking the main gate to the Fort. He had taken it from Mrs. Adkins; E. Tusher had given him the keys. More than a mile away and across a bridge was the guard post. In the sky there was no moon, but stars withheld any sign of rain. Near the post cemetery he turned onto a dirt road. After coasting down a hill Karl peered into the brush along the road. Then an opening in the undergrowth concealed the car. Parts for a pontoon bridge were piled among pine trees. The creek was backed up by a concrete dam with a roadway across the top. On the other side the car slithered along a rutted trail bordering the water. To his left grew trees tangled with vines, and there were swamps. Finally he stopped and got out by a stream emptying into the creek. The rotting boards of a fallen bridge made it impassable.

Karl listened. A noise in the trees and he trembled at the edge. He feared snakes. Water moccasins waited on the banks, blending with gray leaves. It was impossible to see to the other side and he pressed his arms. It was impossible to delay and he jumped. He ran through woods. The trail became sand when the trees ended.

But what, he thought, if someone had found the gasoline and taken it away? Karl coughed in the damp air. Already he was walking down a street of stucco houses with officers' names attached to porches. Across the road were the grounds. Karl passed beneath oak trees in which hundreds of squirrels were sleeping. He started to whistle a ballad but let the notes drop.

The gasoline was still behind his quarters where he had hidden it in a garbage can. First he drew on a pair of black gloves. Then, lifting the gasoline can by its handle, he stepped into the house through the kitchen door, wiping his feet on the mat. At the bottom of the stairs he paused. This was a game, he told himself; in a few minutes it would be someone else's turn to be it. His tennis shoes made no sound on the treads. Now the hallway stretched before him and he shifted the can to his left hand. Before his mother's door he strained to hear the general, distinguished nothing, and turned the knob softly. Inside the room he rested against the wall under a no-smoking sign. The scent of gasoline mixed with old medicinal smells. Bending over the bed, he watched his mother sleep.

She moved her head, her eyelids fluttered open. Her lips rose and fell. "Is it you?"

"Yes."

"What do you have on your hands?"

"A pair of black gloves."

"A pair of black gloves." She closed her eyes again and smiled thinly. "What are you holding?"

"A can of gasoline."

"A can of gasoline." She ran her fingers into her hair. "What are you going to do with it?"

"This." He poured the gasoline, moving the stream from side to side to soak the bedding. "Will you scream?"

At the side of her forehead a vein was raised and throbbing. "It's hard to say. You won't put any on my face?"

"No." He sprinkled the remaining drops in an arc. One must have splashed her throat for he saw her hand reach there. Carefully he placed the empty can on the floor beside an oxygen tank. Behind the door he pulled kitchen matches from his pockets. "Goodbye Mummy Darling, goodbye."

Under the trees he threw himself to the ground, pressed his scarred cheek against leaf mould. His mind reflected images of flames shattering glass. His mother screamed to him. Karl squeezed his eyes tight. The cry pierced his brain until the explosion rolled through tree branches. Above him squirrels awakened and scolded. Should he fall into the narrow stream or lose himself in a swamp he would not fear snakes even if they crawled over his face. E. Tusher would clasp him until this sickness passed.

In the middle of the afternoon an odor of smoke still clung everywhere. Upstairs the rooms were in ruins, most of the roof was burned. Clasping his head in his hands, Karl shivered on the staircase. No one could see him. Where water had seeped through ceilings plaster littered furniture and floors. Two soldiers in fatigues carried the scorched refrigerator through the hall toward a truck parked on the lawn. From the gallery Essie May Smith gave directions. Around the house shrubs had been broken and flower beds trampled. Where was she now? Karl started up the staircase. Through charred beams a passage had been made to his mother's room. What had she looked like then? The treads trembled beneath his feet. Karl shook his head to clear it of fumes.

In his quarters before fixing his first drink, Karl dropped the top of the water tank into the tub, flinching at the crash. The beer can was spotted with rust but he sat cross-legged on the mattress to lift it to Batko Makhno. The gold ring gleamed. He could smell gasoline on his clothing and there was red clay on his shoes. General Dad Sir seemed to be standing on the bureau. Very well, let him stand there. Karl nodded at the absurd apparition and swallowed from the can. Did his visitor realize that he was an orphan at last? Hadn't they killed the anarchist a long time ago? Or had he escaped to another country? Karl threw the can but it bounced off the wall. When the other cans were empty and the bottle finally thrown through a window, he would take a bus into town. Where could he and E. Tusher go? Surely there were islands; they could drive all night. Someone might come. Karl peered through each window and saw no one in the yard. Nevertheless his hand shook as he lowered the shades. He would not lock the door for he had little to hide. With another drink he returned to the cot. He could barely see Batko Makhno from the mattress.

What an emptiness. It did no good to lie about it. Although the air was foul, his nerves did not tremble for release. The cold features shimmered in front of his face. With his knife he pried open the back of the frame and pressed the paper face to his cheek. Behind the lips the teeth were rotting, still he was glad of his chief's embrace. Soldiers jerked them apart and bound them to poles. They refused blindfolds so as to gaze at one another. In the firing squad conscripted peasants stamped their feet and held their rifles awkwardly. Astride his horse on a river bank Batko Makhno waved his arm in farewell to the last of his troop. The water was shallow. "Rumania will be pleasant in August," his young lieutenant said.

Somehow he had fallen asleep again and it was night. The door must have come open for there was an unlighted void where the house stood. Everyone had gone away without telling him. He wept at their thoughtlessness. "Mummy Darling," he murmured and scraped his fingers across his scar. Her burned corpse—she would be buried tomorrow. No one had told him. He had left himself alone. Someone stumbled and said his name. If only he could see lights in the windows he would be good for the rest of his days.

IV

E. Tusher could not see. Stumbling over a tree root he almost cried in vexation. Where was Karl in this dark? There should be a light. If Karl weren't there he would kill himself. Ahead, E. Tusher could barely make out the unlighted cabin. Someone was sitting on the doorsill and he ran, cobweb strands brushing his face. "Karl?" There was no answer. "Karl, I was afraid." E. Tusher sat beside him, their legs touching. "Karl, we can leave tonight. I even packed your bag. Tampa is closer but New Orleans is bigger and they have more boats." He paused. "Everything is beautiful. I've never felt so wonderful."

"Boats?" Karl's voice was dull.

"Yes, so we can leave the country." Karl was frowning as if he didn't understand. "What happened to you? Are you drunk?" E. Tusher's voice quivered.

"I can't travel."

E. Tusher swallowed and clasped his hands. "Do you expect me to stay here like this? Everything is ready and I've even packed a bag for you. We have money. If we need more we can steal another car along the way and sell it."

"To go away?"

In a minute E. Tusher knew he would cry. "Do you want me to go away?"

"I don't understand." Karl looked at him; the eyes were empty. "I'm in mourning. I need my mother's—"

"Karl!" Covering his face with his hands, E. Tusher ran to the side of the cabin. Out of sight his body shook, hoarse cries stuck in his throat. He would not live through the summer if Karl refused him. Before returning to the doorway E. Tusher blew his nose and wiped his eyes. Karl was still sitting there and he bent over him. "Please Karl, sleep now and I'll watch. When you wake up I'll give you coffee. Then we can leave."

"I want to sleep." He yawned. "I've become very tired." E. Tusher saw a shudder of breath pass through him. "I can't sleep now."

"Rest here." E. Tusher paced the yard, twisting his hands. Then he stared, his mouth dropping open, as Karl went inside and closed the door. E. Tusher ran, flung himself at the door panels, and fell into the room. It was like blindness and he groped for the light chain.

"Put out the light." Karl was huddled on the cot, his face pressed into a pillow. "It hurts my eyes." The words were muffled, nearly unintelligible. "Lock the door."

E. Tusher leaned over the bed, tears blurring his sight. "Karl, tell me, say what I've done. And it won't happen ever—I swear."

"Put out the light."

Automatically E. Tusher tugged on the chain; wires in the bulb glowed a second. "See, Karl, I'll even close the door for you." The air inside stirred as it began to rain lightly. E. Tusher slumped on the floor, pressing his forehead against the cot's iron head rail. "You know, Karl, this morning I even killed Medford. Do you care?"

"Is the light out?"

"You don't. Well, what do you suppose will become of me? You can imagine, can't you?" E. Tusher coughed and cleared his throat to stop the pressure there.

"Become of me?"

"Oh Karl, God damn you, just tell me what I did that was wrong."

"Leave me now."

By the door E. Tusher shouted, his face gone white. "All right, you son of a bitch, goodbye! If I didn't hate you, I'd kill you!" He stood outside, waiting for a cry to call him back. Rain ran down his neck. He heard nothing but water dropping on leaves. Beating his face with his fists, he ran into the garage. The general's staff car was parked under the beams. The dark stank of oil and gasoline. E. Tusher balanced on the hood of the car to fasten his belt around his neck. The leather constricted his breath. On the floor oil stains spotted the cement. His face touched cold grease. Mechanical odors cloyed his nostrils. There was blood. He must have struck some object in his fall. How would he ever last through the summer?

A. R. AMMONS:

A Symmetry of Thought

is a mental object:
is to spirit
a rock of individual shape,
a flowerbed, pylon
an arbor vitae
to cerebral loam:
is a moon in the mind,
water and land divided,
a crystal, precipitate,
separation, refinement,
a victory of being over void,
hazardous commitment,
broken eternity,
limited virtue;
coming into matter
spirit fallen
trades eternity
for temporal form:
is a symmetry of motion,
can always find its way
back to oblivion, must move accommodating,
useful, relevant:
is, dead, a perfection;
here is its cage
to contemplate; here
time stops
and all its hollow bells
struck loud
are silenced in the never ending sound.

The wind coming down from

summit and blue air
said I am sorry for you
and lifting past
said you
are mere dust which I
as you see control

yet nevertheless are
instrument of miracle

and rose
out of earshot but
returning in a slow loop
said while
I am always just this bunch of
compensating laws
pushed pushing
not air or motion
but the motion of air

I coughed
and the wind said
Ezra will live
to see your last
sun come up again

I turned (as I will) to weeds and
the wind went off
carving
monuments through a field of stone
monuments whose shape
wind cannot arrest but
taking hold on
changes

while Ezra
listens from terraces of mind
wind cannot reach or
weedroots of my low feeding shiver

Thaw

Winter over, ice bound
mind better not
rush to a spring-meet fast;
might trip, stiff thoughts,
    shatter:
better not warm up too
close to sun;
might melt, run off, gullies
caking off the good
firm country of the brain.

Better go slow,
bend with the gradual movement,
let sap flow but
keep an eye on any
thermal swell rising at
    glassy mind.

If it gets loose wind
will take it
riddling through the underbrush,
but if it stays
solid brilliant ice
tulip root
    warm in coming
will splinter it.

A. KINGSLEY WEATHERHEAD:

Structure and Texture in Henry Green's Latest Novels

It is the common experience of its readers that Henry Green's *Concluding* offers a wealth of percepts and phenomena that appear to lack the coherence that a sturdy dramatic organization would provide. Bruce Bain remarks, "The mystery is unanswered." [1] Philip Toynbee says, "The world of *Concluding* is . . . unhampered by the accepted sequences of cause and effect." [2] Nor is it merely that there are things left unaccommodated into what E. M. Forster's man on the golf course would recognize as a story; it is not merely, in a word, that we never find out what happens to Mary, the missing girl. There are instances less immediately obvious where an image or an incident receives disproportionate emphasis, is endowed, one may say (anticipating the terms used below), with an autonomy that a more strict dramatic control would preclude or where a tone is clearly purveyed but is left unattached, or only equivocally attached, to whatever its proper object may be. The superb place where Mr. Rock watches and hears the starlings' nocturnal descent into the trees is an example of an incident played out like a cadenza in its own uninhibited fulness with no regard for the proportions of the whole; then there is the unmistakable tone of cruelty purveyed by such images among others as the bullet wound in the mouth, the mutilated octopus, and the blood-stained dove with tearing claws for which no certain object of attachment is manifest.

The conception of the novel as a panorama of percepts and phenomena unaccommodated to a comprehensive organization may be expressed, in the terms of John Crowe Ransom, as an anarchy of texture which structure is impotent to control.[3] Now the relationship of structure to texture ought to be that of government to

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[1] "Henry Green: The Man and His Work," *World Review,* May, 1949, p. 58.

[2] "The Novels of Henry Green," *Partisan Review,* XVI (1949), 496.

[3] I use the terms "structure" and "texture" as they are used in *The New Criticism* (New York, 1941), where "texture" does not merely denote a degree of thickness.

governed in a democracy if the novel be regarded as of the order of poetry, and that of government to governed in a totalitarian state if it be regarded as prose. "A poem," says Ransom elsewhere

> is, so to speak, a democratic state, whereas a prose discourse—mathematic, scientific, ethical, or practical and vernacular—is a totalitarian state. The intention of a democratic state is to perform the work of state as effectively as it can perform it, subject to one reservation of conscience; that it will not despoil its members, the citizens, of the free exercise of their own private and independent characters. But the totalitarian state is interested solely in being effective, and regards the citizens as no citizens at all; that is, regards them as functional members whose existence is totally defined by their allotted contributions to its ends; it has no use for their private characters, and therefore no provision for them.[4]

The structure of *Concluding,* however, so far from despoiling its members, the texture, of their "private and independent characters," virtually fails to govern at all. The texture enjoys not merely democracy but the complete anarchy of the Imagist poem where structure bows out entirely in favor of the autonomy of the texture.

Now it is particularly useful to view the relationship of the parts of the novel to the whole through the metaphor Ransom uses. For when the tension within the form is seen in terms of political science its immediate analogy to the central conflict in the content of the novel becomes visible. The latter conflict is waged between Edge and the Institution on the one hand and the girls and Mr. Rock on the other. Edge and the Institution seek to deny the individuality of the girls, who are continually thought and spoken of in mass: "two hundred and eighty-nine turned over," "three hundred budding state servants," "six hundred golden legs." They are Ministry girls and their names all begin with M. At the dance they all wear white uniform dresses, they lift white arms to blue-veined shoulders, and there is a "slither of three hundred pairs of shoes." And the denial of individuality is in turn a denial of love; for love must fix itself not in a generalization or an abstract concept but in individual features.

The girls therefore break away from the Institution, where each is only a unit in an abstraction, and seek to be discovered as separate entities and hence to be loved. The waxing of identity conse-

[4] "Criticism as Pure Speculation," *The Intent of the Critic,* ed. Donald S. Stauffer (Princeton, 1941), p. 108.

quent upon their departure from the Institution is not merely an example of the phenomenon that girls in a crowd *do* tend to look and act alike and *do* tend to assume identity as they separate themselves. For the influence of the Institution is such that individual features are denied even to the separate girls when they are within its aura. Moira, for example, appears alone both in the Institution and outside it, but it is only in the latter situation that her individual features are perceived sharply as a picture and her identity granted. In the former situation she is described from the particular viewpoint of Marchbanks. And although this servant of the Institution is not entirely corrupted by it and recognizes at least the maturity of Moira which is an index of the latter's eligibility for knowledge, her impaired vision of the girl in denying the individual feature acts entirely in consonance with the Institution ideal. Marchbanks has removed her spectacles so that, although light from *outside* gives life, the description of the girl, being the vision of an old woman with unaided eyes, is blurred:

> her bare legs a gold haze to Miss Marchbanks' weak eyes, her figure, as the older woman thought, a rounded mass softly merged into the exaggeration of a grown woman's, her neck and face the colour of ripening apricots from sun with strong eyes that were an alive blue, shapeless to Miss Marchbanks' dull poached eggs of of vision, but a child so alive, at some trick of summer light outside, that the older woman marvelled again how it could ever be that the State should send these girls, who were really women, to be treated like children.[5]

Later, Moira appears at Mr. Rock's cottage, the remaining stronghold of individuality. Rock is wearing his spectacles; he even takes them off, cleans, and replaces them. The metaphor of the ripening fruit is now focused and framed: her youth "made him think of a ripe plum, on a hot day, against green leaves on a wall." In a moment, "She nibbled at one of the azaleas in her arms. She knew she made a picture."

Merode also, lying in the fallen beech tree having escaped the Institution, becomes a picture in the vision of Sebastian Birt and, momentarily at least, is granted recognition as an individual and the autonomy of a work of art. Mary, who has escaped altogether, has gone one better than any of them and is hence the object of their jealousy.

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[5] Henry Green, *Concluding* (London, 1950), p. 48.

Now if the major conflict in the content of the novel is such as I have suggested, we must conceive of a strangely intimate relationship between content and form, that is between the content and the extent to which structure controls texture. A similarly intimate relationship in *Loving,* where the content is seen as determining the form, is hinted at by Robert Phelps who finds that "Edith and Rauice *persuade the final sentence of the book to abet them* by assuring us that 'over in England they were married and lived happily ever after.'"[6] With comparable assimilation it may be said that Edge wishes the novel *Concluding* to have the structure-texture relationship of prose, while the girls, since the only available structure is that which Edge wishes to impose, wish the novel to be an Imagist poem.

What Edge wants is rule by structure and the consequent attenuation of the autonomy of texture. The reader also, preconditioned by his instinct for order and his long literary experience of expectancy satisfied, desires the rule of structure, though presumably to a degree less Procrustean than Edge. Both earnestly desire the return of Mary which alone would render the eventuality of her departure susceptible to inclusion within a structural framework. And both desire that the dance shall be held.

James Hall regards the dance and the determination of Edge that it shall be put on, come what may, as an indication of her disposition toward fun and hence some small mitigation of her villainy.[7] But it is essentially organized fun. "They must and shall enjoy themselves," says Edge, as if it were to be a compulsory Komsomol party in a ferromanganese plant. It is above all an operation in which Edge can demonstrate and enact her supposedly benevolent autocracy by leading a uniform performance, a scientific movement in which entity is lost in ordered harmony. The girls are mere homogeneous units in the mass; Edge, as she tells Rock, "will not be bothered tonight with individuals"; and Birt and Elizabeth who manifest individual love are *de trop.* Furthermore, this sexless engagement before the background of white images, like the dancing of Kate and Edith in *Loving,* is essentially a virginal entertainment. And as such it merely manifests the general crippling aim of the Institution to insulate its girls from knowledge, both from knowing and being known as individuals.

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[6] "The Vision of Henry Green," *Hudson Review,* V (Winter, 1953), p. 617. Italics mine.

[7] "The Fiction of Henry Green: Paradoxes of Pleasure-Pain," *Kenyon Review,* XIX (Winter, 1957), p. 80.

But the dance is, of course, a triumph for structure. The reader, having awaited it, welcomes it. For him it is a fulfilment of expectation which, amid the wealth of unrelated images and unexpected, isolated incidents, is gratifying.

Now in *Nothing,* the important textural operation is the exercise of freedom on the part of Jane Weatherby who contrives to achieve a new disposition of amorous relationships among friends and acquaintances and in the end to marry John Pomfret. The significant impediment to her complete textural liberty in this operation is Mayfair society. But unlike the girls in *Concluding* who had sought freedom and in its cause had fought the element of opposition, Jane champions the society that inhibits her and exercises her autonomy with utmost care not to ruffle its glittering surface. The major conflict in the novel, therefore, is not waged between the individual and authority, but between those who seek to guard the niceties of society and those who ride over them rough-shod.

Society in *Nothing* with its clear Congrevian and Wildean echoes would rather see life steadily and, if possible, "beautifully" than see it whole; and it insistently keeps from view all but the small manageable concerns. Big things are not admissible topics: it does not speak as does Philip Weatherby, Jane's son, of "making this country a place fit to live in at last" or of "life" as does Mary Pomfret, John's daughter. Big things must become "little," Jane's favorite word. Society will allow discussion of hats, clothes, and jewelry; and they are important because they show. It will not hear of mortality or consanguinity (Philip and Mary who are playing with the idea of marriage are very probably half-brother and sister). Its anathemas are bluff honesty, undiplomatic truth according to hard fact, and drunkenness. And against such things it protects itself by wit and laughter and by a convention that allows conversation to veer at whim. The anathemas of society are frequently inflicted upon it by Dick Abbot and Liz Jennings, who, before the general re-arrangement of relationships, are respectively Jane's beau and John's mistress. The former has all the good instincts of honor and fair play that an English public schoolboy associates with the word "cricket" and a minimum of sensibility and tact. His behavior at the party characterizes him: he reprehends John for his tactful withholding of Jane's telegram, he shoves blunt facts of life into the discussion on young girls' lodging problems, and he leaves Jane's table when for the

sake of society, in a special way to be discussed below, he ought to have remained. Liz is equally offensive: in particular she lets her anger break surface on occasion, she fails to conceal drunkenness, and at the party, Richard having left Jane's table, she fails to join him as she should.

The superficial prettiness of society, which is the synecdoche for society itself, finds a figurative expression in pattern. In *Nothing,* we therefore encounter a leaning toward symmetry, especially in Jane, society's champion. Symmetry is at its splendid best, of course, in the room decorated for the party, especially before humans appear.

> Standing prepared, empty, curtained, shuttered, tall mirrors facing across laid tables crowned by napkins, with space rocketing transparence from one glass silvered surface to the other, supporting walls covered in olive-coloured silk, chandeliers repeated to a thousand thousand profiles to be lost in olive-grey depths as quiet as this room's untenanted attention . . . [8]

The symmetry produced by the mirrors is duplicated in the tables each set for two men and two women. Later, however, Richard Abbot, the boor, breaks the symmetry of Jane's table by leaving it to join another. Jane is upset; and there is nothing except his offense in thus breaking symmetry and another previous perpetration of it to motivate her later complaint, "Oh Richard you let me down at times of crisis." Far more significant, however, than these elements of symmetry is the symmetry in the form of the novel. Once again we assume an intimate relationship between content and form; and we discover that not only in the former but in the latter Jane Weatherby champions symmetry and Richard Abbot, Philip, and others to a less extent despoil it.

Thus, just as Edge, the champion of structure in *Concluding,* had desired outcomes gratifying the reader's aroused expectancy, so in *Nothing* Jane Weatherby desires and finally contrives to obtain such an outcome. Here, however, the expectancy is aroused not so much by elements of plot which demand resolution as by patterns of matching scenes which call for symmetrical completion (we may be reminded of the symmetrical choreography of the dance in *Concluding,* so satisfying to Edge).

The scenes of *Nothing* arrange themselves into patterns after the manner in which rhyming lines form patterns in various stanza for-

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[8] Henry Green, *Nothing* (New York, 1950), p. 84.

mations or couplets. For the purpose of illustrating this phenomenon, I have considered as matching any two scenes in which there is an identity or a maximum of similarity between lengths, characters involved, and the topics of dialogue. In the matching of the topics of dialogue, there is, of course, room for a great deal of variation within the similarity, from which is derived the same kind of pleasure as that characteristically derived from rhyme. Two scenes, the tenth and the eleventh, taken almost at random from an appreciably large number of matching scenes, will serve to illustrate. Scene 10 is a dialogue between Philip and Mary; Scene 11 is one between their parents. In the former, broaching the topic of the war between generations, Philip says, "They all ought to be liquidated" (p. 71). In the latter, John remarks, "One's offspring are a sacred farce" (p. 78). In Scene 10, Philip complains that their parents' generation has done nothing but fight in two wars and that they are rotten to the core. Then follows,

> "Barring your relations I suppose?" "Well Mamma's a woman. She's really not to blame. Nevertheless I do include her. Of course she couldn't manage much about the slaughter. And she can be marvellous at times. Oh I don't know though, I think I hate them every one." (p. 71)

The tiny motif of slaughter here is echoed in the second scene in the speech of Jane, too long to quote, where she describes her horror at her servant's project to procure a mouse in order to entertain the cat. Two further topics common to both scenes are the consanguinity of the juniors and the obsession recently acquired by Penelope, Jane's small daughter, for holding on to her elbow. Finally there is a delightful match between the end of the first scene and the opening of the second. In the former Philip, citing a discussion between Richard Abbot and his mother about whether oxen dream, etc., objects most disgustedly to the unorthodoxy of parental conversation topics. Jane, however, opens the second scene by asking "Oh my dear when are we ever going to see the sun?" And for a few moments she and John chat conventionally about the weather.

We may now consider the disposition in the novel of scenes that match according to topic and/or character and/or length. Clearly the first two scenes match each other; each deals with a couple lunching in the good hotel overlooking the park, and each scene is eleven pages in length. Between them the analogies are rife, both in the limited descriptions that accompany the dialogue and in the

topics of the dialogues themselves. And the analogies are pointed in order that it may be indicated clearly from the outset that the novel proposes among its ends the pleasure derived from the reconcilement of sameness with difference. In the first scene, for instance: "He reached across and laid his hand over hers on top of the white tablecloth. Her nails were scarlet. He stroked the bare ring finger" (pp. 11–12). In the second scene: "Reaching across she laid a hand over his on the white tablecloth. Her nails were scarlet. She gently scratched the skin by his thumbnail" (p. 13).

The sixth scene matches these first two: John is again with Liz in the hotel for Sunday lunch. The match, once again, is somewhat pointed by John's anger with the waiter, restrained though it is, which echoes Abbot's earlier violence. Of the scenes between the second and sixth, the third is incongruous and matches nothing: this is devoted to a dialogue between Philip and Mary, two whose deeds and words lack the selection and polish society requires, who contribute nothing to society and hence nothing to the pattern and symmetry dear to it. The fourth and fifth scenes match closely: each covers six pages and each is concerned with the parent testing the child's reaction to the suggestion of the parent's marrying again. The first six scenes then match as follows: AABCCA. The seventh scene, in order to preserve some kind of symmetry in the group in spite of the intrusion of the third, ought clearly to match the sixth and, in turn, the first and second. It ought therefore to transact a Sunday luncheon appointment between Richard Abbot and Jane. It does not do so, however. The seventh scene matches the sixth in conversation topic, especially in the assurance given by the respective men to their women friends that the latter will one day have children; it is enacted in the hotel; and it is of approximately the same length. But in place of Richard and Jane the scene features Philip and Mary. Richard therefore, having failed to take Jane to lunch, has spoiled the symmetry by his default; and Philip has usurped his mother's place in the form.

The next four scenes are paired off into two matching couplets. The first pair, embodying the separate visits of Mary and Philip to Brighton and to Arthur Morris, have internal matching; the second pair, the tenth and eleventh scenes which were studied above, conclude the first of the three parts of the novel at exactly one third of the way through.

Part Two begins with the party. And here Philip's announcement

of his engagement usurps his mother's place both texturally and structurally. As the party proceeds external symmetry is destroyed along with Abbot's despoliation of the internal and Liz's flagrant breach of social decorum: "Then you maintain I should have gone to that beastly bitch's daughter's table" (p. 119) exemplifies not only unsuppressed anger but a lack of sympathy for pattern.

The seven scenes following the party which remain to Part Two form no clear pattern. Their lengths vary from two pages to ten; and in the arrangement of neither the dialogue topics nor the characters taking part in them is any kind of formal order discoverable. It is during these scenes that the reorganization of the disposition of affections, what Richard Abbot calls "the general post," begins. And the pattern is correspondingly upset.

With the opening of the third part of the novel, however, at exactly two-thirds of the way through, patterns again begin to be manifest. The first two scenes, that is the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth of the book, between John and Liz and John and Jane respectively, match rather closely in their conversation topics, though not in their lengths. Then follow five scenes, the twenty-ninth to the thirty-third, which form a pattern, AABAA. The characters and topics of these scenes are as follows: John and Mary, consanguinity; John and Jane, consanguinity; Richard Abbot and Liz, John's diabetes (this is the incongruous middle scene); John and Jane, the plan of a trip to Italy for Mary; John and Mary, Mary's prospective trip. Following this set is another of five scenes, the thirty-fourth to the thirty-eighth, where the same pattern is only a little less clear. Here the incongruous middle scene is enacted by Philip and Liz. The characters in the others are respectively Richard and Liz, John and Jane, John and Jane, and Richard and Liz.

The last five scenes of the novel form the pattern, AABCC. The first two are transacted by Philip and Jane, and Mary and John, respectively; and in both, the parents announce their marriage plans. The incongruous middle scene is that between Mary and Philip in which these two break up their marriage plans. And the last two are between Richard and Liz and John and Jane, respectively; and these not only match each other but match the opening scenes of the novel: Richard gets his choking fit and goes black in the face as he had with the waiter in the hotel, and John re-enacts with Jane the ecstasy he had had with Penelope, which formed his conversation topic with Liz in the first scene of the novel.

Symmetry, and hence structure, is finally satisfied; but within it,

the texture has exercised its rights. For the structure of *Nothing,* while it inevitably attenuates the liberty and autonomy of texture and tends to inhibit individuality and foster the stereotype, offers an essentially benevolent government. And texture can find its freedom, albeit a chartered one, in and according to structure. It does not have to run away and live it up in the woods.

A role analogous to that played in *Nothing* by society is played in *Doting* by marriage. For just as society in *Nothing* presents a pretty screen which is not blemished when cruel animal passions discover their objects behind it, so the marriage in *Doting* is kept almost immaculate, but not quite, informing the structure of the novel while each of its partners provides an antithetical texture by exercising freedom in extra-marital doting.

At first sight the Middletons' marriage appears to be more strenuously maintained by Diana than by Arthur. In accordance with naive middle-class notions of sexual relationships it seems to thrive on symmetry as does society in *Nothing*. Once again, the symmetry may be discovered in both content and form, and Diana may be discovered working for it. She invites Annabel, for instance, to make up the foursome at the boy's first and last evenings of the holidays. She resents Arthur's disturbing the furniture, two chairs and a sofa, which are arrayed, we understand, in a pattern about the fireplace. But particularly, it is Diana who succeeds in constructing some kind of external symmetry in the sequence of scenes in the novel. These do not dispose themselves in manifest patterns to the extent that the scenes in *Nothing* do. But there is some small triumph for symmetry in the fact that the book opens and closes with scenes matching almost exactly in length and only a little less exactly in the company transacting them, the topics of conversation, and the descriptions. That there is a second theatre party at all is due to Diana. In addition there is at least one set of five scenes in which the outline of a pattern is perfectly clear, which pattern is largely the result of Diana's activities and decisions.

The set begins and ends with a scene of love-making between Diana and Arthur, the thirty-second and the thirty-sixth scenes respectively.[9] The intermediate scenes are enacted respectively by the following people who transact the following business: Arthur and Annabel meet for dinner, and subsequently he tries and fails to seduce her; Diana makes a long-distance call to Charles; Diana and

[9] Henry Green, *Doting* (London, 1952), pp. 162 ff. and 177ff.

Charles meet for drinks in the latter's apartment, and subsequently he tries and fails to seduce her. Of these five scenes, four are dominated by Diana who, while she obviously acts in accordance with other motives, favors the cause of symmetry. This last scene shows Diana's second rebuttal of Charles. The first rebuttal is motivated quite clearly by her sense of symmetry. Referring to her husband's unilateral activities, she says, "No, Charles. Two wrongs don't make a right, do they?" But she knows that she did not really find Arthur "in bed with that horrible little Anne Paynton," as she says she did. And therefore symmetry is better satisfied with a qualified infidelity.

But Arthur's activities, which appear in the above rendering to demand the counterpoising endeavors of Diana, may themselves be regarded as restoring a symmetry that Diana has endangered. The main threat that Arthur offers to the marriage, and hence in turn to structure and symmetry, consists in his intended treatment of Annabel as a mistress when she ought to be held as a daughter. But this intended treatment is in effect only a symmetrical echo of Diana's intentions *vis à vis* the boy, Peter. And she, in a sense, starts it all. Diana, characterized at the opening of the novel as "the mother, the spouse," frequently confuses the roles. Not only does she treat her husband as her child, but, by inviting Peter for the sake of the light to sit in "the empty chair sacred to his father," she indicates a limited endeavor to treat her child as her husband.

The boy, however, declines. And then later, in her effort to catch up with her husband's doting on Annabel, Diana is at a disadvantage. For the boy is only a boy; and his instincts are still predominantly directed toward food. Whereas the girl is "out" and could and might fulfill the role of mistress. Diana, therefore, for the sake of symmetry, or "reprisals" to use her word, sends Peter off to Scotland alone and attaches Charles Addinsell, who ironically (and symmetrically) had been initially introduced into the melee by Arthur, just as Annabel had been brought in by Diana.

As the novel proceeds, doting becomes an increasingly formidable danger to the marriage: textural liberty threatens structure. But the supremacy of the marriage over all other individual considerations is assumed without question by both husband and wife, and for its sake they voluntarily curtail their doting. In the form of marriage, structure once again hands down no immutable directives but governs with a light rein and provides for a limited degree of textural operation.

I have considered the intimate relationship of form and content in the latest novels where it lends itself to some kind of accounting. I do not doubt, however, that the concept of the tension between texture and structure and of the operation of characters upon the novel as well as within it might be put to some sort of critical use in studies of the earlier novels. It might be interesting, for instance, to consider Max Adey, in *Party Going,* as endeavoring to impose structure upon anarchy, or Raunce, in *Loving,* as managing not only Mrs. Tennant's affairs but, to some extent, Henry Green's.

PAUL CORDELL:

Man of Asylums

The man of asylums
By the stunt of his tongue
Was reciting the peril
Of the beautiful stillness
Of fruit in jars

And dangled to tell
The fall of the pear
Doomed from the bough
To the crockery cellar
By his mother's sign

O the circus he made
Spinning with the lid
To the twist of a stop
Time in the shape
Of her hand turning

The mischief that flashed
Once and once only
A tall beginning
Now hushed in the dance
Of the jar on the shelf

GEORGE GARRETT:

Holy Roller

Nothing so white as he is
(neither the lazy lily nor unlikely unicorn)
when, shirt sweatstained, flapping like
a luffing sail around his ploughboy muscles,
arms outspread like airplanes taking off,
he grins and hollers "Let us pray!"

I know your prayers, brother. I know
why they ran you out of Plant City on a rail.
I know that whiteness is designed—
eggsmooth jowls, fishbelly hands, ram's hair—
to trouble the virgins where they kneel
and sweetly press their hairless thighs together.
It's your voice, dark and rich
as a clarinet in lowest register,
tickles the good wives where they live.
    I know you of old, brother.

I know this too.
The ways of God are hazy, daze
a skeptic intellect like summer lightning.
Others false and foolish as you (and I)
have been chosen and, thus chosen,
babbled more wisely than they knew.
You bow your handsome goathead and
God springs from your lips like a snowy dove.

JOANNE DE LONGCHAMPS:

Old Man Singing at the Edge of Land

I sunned the heavy breast beneath my hand—
My spider-mother gave warm milk and later
I tore the web to find a new equator.
Egypt I held sinning at my side,
spun new myths with an old spell
and took a lioness as bride,
proving the forms the mind can marry.

I lusted more than I could carry,
found wenches in books, round girls in galleries
and forged my role on wayward histories
in fantasy before the fact.
Early, late and no longer,
I starved and sang toward the double act.
Why does an old man sing? I sing to die—

At land's blue margin sirens ply
grim shuttles for all shapes that move—
I use my breath to bargain with,
to trade for healing death those heats of love.

MORTON MARCUS:

When the Jews

"And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite and the Hittite . . . "
Exodus 23:28

When the Jews journeyed through
the wilderness, God, after causing water
to be banged from rock and raining the dew
that was bread from heaven, said He'd make His hand
a hollering of hornets to shout at Hivites,
Canaanites and Hittites words so biting
it would smack them from the land. Here the earth
was so rich and life-sustaining
cows weren't needed or bees.
Just think of that hand swinging
through the land, terrible in its beauty
for the Jew, beautiful in its terror
for the infidel.
Those days have gone,
and with them the promise and the Promiser.
Desert remains, which can sustain life
only for itself and kills men
easily who venture into it.
A few
who have escaped report that they beheld
a kingdom fabulous with food and drink when they
were floundering and hungry.
Others say they encountered pools
or canteens they could never reach.
Some have returned among us to rant
or answer questions.

KONSTANTINOS LARDAS:

The Burial of Nikos Kazantzakis

Through you
The caique-borne Ulysses
Drifted to icy regions of the North;

The fallen Charon stretching beside him
On the slimy floor,
Smiling, to touch, to take.

You,
Schweitzer kissed;
The church, the nation shunned.

Through you
Ulysses clasped
The youthful fisherman

Roving the shores of Africa
Preaching of love,
Of love.

Through you
A gnarled Cretan
Rose to exceed

Exhausted Charon's labors;
Stretching, to touch, to take,
Your coffin in his arms.

Lifted on high,
Lowered into the earth
By strapping man,

So should all giants be entombed;
So should they leave
This earth.

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